



Focus on **Engine Idling and Air Pollution**

From the Department of Ecology's Air Quality Program

Have you ever left your car engine running while you waited to pick up your children, or while you waited in the drive-through line at your bank or a favorite fast-food restaurant? Have you sometimes let your engine idle for several minutes to warm up your car first thing in the morning? Most of us have. But when you leave your car or truck running while it's parked or sitting still, the engine produces air pollution. This pollution contributes to problems like smog and global warming, as well as being harmful to health.

Is idling really that bad?

We've all experienced the harmful effects of idling. If you've ever walked past a row of trucks or buses on a busy city street, you may have tried to avoid inhaling the toxic exhaust fumes. Or maybe you've sat in your car at a red light behind a vehicle with especially smelly exhaust, and wished the light would hurry up and change. A great deal of idling takes place at schools, where buses and cars line up to drop off and pick up children; and the children end up breathing the exhaust.

Though we might find it annoying, most of us probably don't think too much about the health effects of breathing exhaust. But motor vehicle exhaust contains carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, particulate matter, and other toxic air pollutants. Recent studies have shown a direct link between many respiratory diseases and the pollutants found in vehicle exhaust. Children are especially at risk because they breathe faster (50 percent more air per pound of body weight) than adults. Vehicle exhaust increases many children's asthma symptoms. More than one out of every 10 children in Washington has been diagnosed with asthma, and the number is rising.

In addition to these health effects, exhaust emissions from idling vehicles contribute to environmental problems such as smog, global warming, and acid rain.

What can be done?

Stopping unnecessary vehicle idling is one relatively easy way to contribute to improved air quality and respiratory health in our communities. All you have to do is turn your car off if you're going to be waiting for more than 30 seconds. Just remember, when the car isn't moving, the engine shouldn't be running. When the engine isn't running, it's not polluting.

Isn't it better to keep a car running than to keep turning it off and restarting it?

Actually, it isn't. Frequent restarting of a car's engine has little effect on it; but excessive idling can actually damage a car's engine components, including cylinders, spark plugs, and the exhaust system. Plus, contrary to popular belief, idling is not an effective way to warm up most car engines. Today's automobile manufacturers recommend waiting no more than 30 seconds before you begin driving, even on the coldest days.

Other benefits of cutting down on idling include:

- + You'll save money. Idling a vehicle for 10 minutes a day uses an average of about 22 gallons of gas per year. If gas costs \$2.00 a gallon, you'll save \$44 per year, just by turning your key.
- + You'll protect your health, and that of others. By turning your vehicle's engine off when it isn't moving, you and others around you, including children and people with respiratory problems, won't have to breathe unhealthy exhaust fumes from a vehicle that is going nowhere.
- + You'll help protect our climate and air. You'll reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to problems such as smog and global warming.
- + You'll reduce wear and tear on your vehicle's engine.

Where can I get more information?

For more information, visit the Department of Ecology's Air Quality Program web site at http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/air/cars/No_IDLE.html ; or call:

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If you need this information in an alternate format, please contact Tami Dahlgren at (360) 407-6800. If you are a person with a speech or hearing impairment, call 711, or 1-800-833-6388 for TTY.